Tony DiTerlizzi

Biography

"With magic as your captain you can choose just about any destination, any time, or any place if you never abandon imagination."

Tony DiTerlizzi formally proclaimed his credo, "Never Abandon Imagination," in the opening pages of his very first children's book, *Jimmy Zangwow's Out-of-this-World Moon Pie Adventure* (2000). However, those three words derived from the above quotation were first put to paper in a poetry journal written by the artist in summer 1995, and they hold as much weight for him today as they did then, when he first achieved recognition as an illustrator for the role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*.

In fact, DiTerlizzi has crafted an entire mission statement, more expressive and methodical than that twenty-two-year-old phrase, around which all of his past, present, and future work adheres.

The full text is as follows:

*Imagination is a world of possibility that exists within each of us. It is what makes us uniquely human. It is our creative fingerprint that touches and influences the world around us. Imagination is essential to art and science; to innovation and prosperity. It gives us hope, calls us to action, and leads to change.*

Whether it is fairies, dragons, robots, or aliens, all of my children's book characters are siblings born of my imagination – an imagination strengthened through years of encouragement from family, teachers, and friends. While so many others abandoned it during their transition from childhood to adulthood, I have continued to cultivate mine, with the promise of bringing joy and wonder to children everywhere.
Imagination empowers us to envision and create a reality of what could be. We must hold it dear, foster it, and never abandon it.

Holding true to his vow to never abandon imagination, DiTerlizzi has achieved amazing success in exciting and inspiring the youth of today, and rekindling the feelings of our own childlike wonder, while carrying on the great tradition of narrative illustration.

Tony DiTerlizzi has written and illustrated over twenty children's books — some of which were made into a major motion picture — and served as illustrator on many more. He has painted hundreds of dragons, trolls, goblins, fairies, wizards, elves, and every other fantasy creature imaginable. Many of his books have been on the New York Times bestseller list, he has won the prestigious Caldecott Honor Award, and his works are read in classrooms throughout the world. But beyond the awards, accolades, and well-deserved book blurbs exists an artist with tremendous talent, unbridled determination, humility, and an undying childlike effusion of wonder.

In preparing the exhibition and reviewing the extent of DiTerlizzi’s creative output of the last quarter century, I quickly came to realize I was working alongside a visionary possessing immense creativity, with a mind filled with fantastic images and worlds yet unexplored. Though his artwork and writings are well regarded, there is much more to the man than has been revealed on paper. Therefore, I felt compelled to explore the source of this creativity and understand how such a remarkable mind evolved.

The Birth of Imagination

“If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.”

— Albert Einstein

Though the literary success of The Spiderwick Chronicles would eventually return him to the city of Los Angeles where he was born, Tony DiTerlizzi spent most of his youth in Jupiter, Florida. He devoted many days to exploring the insects and flora in the dense ecosystems to his west and in the shallows of the Atlantic Ocean to his east, just a short bike ride away. When he was not spending time outdoors in the Sunshine State’s often uncomfortably high heat and humidity, young DiTerlizzi hid himself away in the air-conditioned refuge of his childhood bedroom – imagining, creating, and drawing.

DiTerlizzi recalls that his first artistic influence was his mother, Carole. He notes that though his mother was very artistic in her youth, she did not receive encouragement for her creativity during her formative years. However, she ensured that all three of her children would be inspired to use their imaginations, creating artwork for them, including origami and paper dolls of characters from Gilligan’s Island, and painting a mural on Tony’s bedroom wall of A.A. Milne’s Winnie the Pooh characters as depicted by E.H. Shepard — an artist whom DiTerlizzi would revisit later in his career.

DiTerlizzi remembers:

My play always involved imagination. It started with listening to my mom read the stories of Winnie-the-Pooh and learning that toys come to life when you play with them. After I’d moved on from stuffed animals, my Star Wars action figures acted out scenes from the movie and other adventures I’d dream up. My Micronauts would crash land in my bedroom and explore my bizarre world, my Aurora dinosaur models would come to life and grow to their proper size, and I was the narrator moving these characters around and coming up with stories for them.

Relying on a collection of Golden Nature Guide books which included titles like Insects, Birds, Seashores, and Reptiles and Amphibians, DiTerlizzi compiled an immense insect collection complete with his own hand-drawn field guide. He recalls checking off pages of the Insects guide as he added new ones to his collection. DiTerlizzi notes that spending time with his father also helped feed his growing imagination. As a Boy Scout, he often went on outdoor adventures with his Scoutmaster father, Tony, such as camping, hiking, and visiting historical sites.

DiTerlizzi often spent summers playing outdoor games with neighborhood kids, including one based on Sid and Marty Krofft’s sci-fi adventure series, The Land of the Lost. In advance of the game, DiTerlizzi prepared dinosaur footprints in the gravel of their driveway. This delighted his friends when they arrived and encouraged more creative adventuring.

But more than anything, DiTerlizzi loved to draw. The encouragement he received from his parents was invaluable. When his father announced that his employer, Pratt & Whitney, was holding an art show in which staff and their family members were allowed to participate, DiTerlizzi’s parents encouraged their ten-year-old son to enter the competition, even though the majority of participants were adults. He created a watercolor painting of a Jurassic landscape, complete with a Brontosaurus. To the DiTerlizzi family’s great surprise, he won first place. For the young artist, this award carried tremendous weight and inspired him to continue making art.

A Visit to Gondwanaland

When he was twelve years old, DiTerlizzi documented the first recorded visit to a new world in a folder he titled A New Realm in Nature & Science Fiction Combined, You Are Exploring: GONDWANALAND. Within the pages of the folder, the young explorer described in great detail the flora and fauna of the unknown continent. Dr. DiTerlizzi, as he referred to himself, created the first map of the world during an adventure supposedly sponsored by The Audubon Society and National Geographic — although the list of expenses notes that the grant was for a measly $536. After navigating through the secret entrance in the coral reef enclosure of Gondwanaland, he found himself on a large island with Snow World in the north and the Deep Dying Desert in the south, divided by the Mushy Swamp and Woody Woods. Being the first civilized man in this new world...
DiTerlizzi devised the title of Gondwanaland after the Gondwana supercontinent that combined with Laurasia around 300 million years ago to form the larger continent of Pangea. Gondwana later separated to form the continents of the Southern Hemisphere while Laurasia formed the continents of the Northern. DiTerlizzi's idea for the fictional Gondwanaland was that it came from a piece of the supercontinent that broke off from Antarctica, South America, and Australia and became its own island that was left undiscovered for millennia.

Influenced by his collection of Golden Nature Guide books, monsters from the Dungeons & Dragons role-playing game, and Jim Henson's creatures in the recently released Dark Crystal film, DiTerlizzi created his book of imagined characters in the style of an Audubon Field Guide. As is customary in identifying new species, within this Gondwanaland field guide DiTerlizzi gave the new-found monsters English and Latin names. Listed within the guide are creatures like "Tree Dwellers" (Longis Armis Swingis), a "Snow Creature" (Bigis Badis Mammais), and the evil, giant orange "Ajax Lizards" (Becarefulis Bitis Hardis).

As playful as the book appears, its importance in DiTerlizzi's life as an artist and storyteller cannot be overstated. For within this early collection of artwork and stories lie the seeds of imagination and wonder contained in several works produced by DiTerlizzi throughout his career. The explorer Dr. DiTerlizzi reflects the wonder, innocence, and creativity of the central characters in DiTerlizzi's early picture books Jimmy Zangwow and Ted. The Wonderful Trilogy expresses the same feeling of exploration, though the female protagonist is slightly older than the characters in Jimmy Zangwow and Ted. Arthur Spiderwick's writings in The Spiderwick Chronicles hark back to the discovery of the flora and fauna in the strange new world of Gondwanaland. The depictions of the creatures mirror his later book Arthur Spiderwick's Field Guide to the Fantastical World Around You, illustrated by DiTerlizzi and co-written with Holly Black in 2005. Of course, the creation of dragons and other fantasy creatures predicted DiTerlizzi's later rise as one of the most beloved artists of Dungeons & Dragons and Magic: The Gathering.

Another folder contains sketches of characters and scenes from Star Wars (1977), which DiTerlizzi first saw in theaters at age seven. The highly detailed drawings include scenes of the battle between the AT-AT walkers and snowsiders from the beginning of The Empire Strikes Back (1980). For some of these drawings, DiTerlizzi relied on the book The Art of Star Wars (1979), which showcased original designs by Ralph McQuarrie, the artist whom director George Lucas hired to design the look of the original Star Wars.

Also included in a pocket of his Star Wars folder are dozens of hand-written pages and sketches related to the 1978 TV series Battlestar Galactica, including a sixteen-page Dungeons & Dragons-style campaign titled "The Secret of Carillon," based on the planet Carillon from the series's pilot episode. The pocket also contains character sheets for Battlestar Galactica characters Starbuck, Apollo, the Daggit, a Cylon, and assorted other aliens.

Interspersed among the early sketches of creatures and maps are random drawings, notes, and homemade Dungeons & Dragons character sheets drawn in the style of Jim Davis, creator of Garfield. It was during this same year that twelve-year-old DiTerlizzi received a Dungeons & Dragons Basic Set, which detailed the rules of play for the role-playing game.

The artist initiated another project during his early teen years, for which he drew caricatures of rock musicians each day during his summer vacation. By the end of the summer he had completed no less than 100 drawings of popular musicians of the time including Phil Collins, David Bowie, Lionel Richie, Van Halen, Madonna, Huey Lewis, and others.

DiTerlizzi continued to draw throughout his high school years, culminating in a special art project produced during his senior year titled "Views from Wonderland," a takeoff on Lewis Carroll's 1865 book Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. At the time, DiTerlizzi had taken every art class his school offered. His art teacher Tom Wetzl suggested he spend one-on-one time with him so that DiTerlizzi could create a portfolio piece to show to prospective art schools. Mr. Wetzl spoke with the school's guidance counselor and convinced him to allow DiTerlizzi to spend an hour each day with him during his planning period. Wetzl instructed his pupil to focus all of his attention on one project that he could create over the course of an entire semester.

DiTerlizzi remembers discussing his project at home with his younger brother, Adam, who happened to be reading Alice's Adventures in Wonderland in school. The following day at school DiTerlizzi suggested to his teacher that he illustrate scenes from the classic book, and his teacher challenged him to create a storybook full of original illustrations by the end of the semester. At the end of the term, DiTerlizzi had completed his project, which featured Elton John as the Mad Hatter, with flourishes drawn with a highlighter pen that would glow under a black light. Mr. Wetzl was quite pleased with his student's final submission.

Word spread around the school about DiTerlizzi's art project, and the young artist shared his book with classmates who asked to see it. Small crowds of students gathered and expressed admiration of his talent. Sixteen-year-old DiTerlizzi received the validation that many teenagers desperately need at that crucial time, and knew then that he wanted to illustrate children's books for the rest of his life.

Entering the World of Dungeons & Dragons

Throughout the 1990s, DiTerlizzi was highly regarded as one of the top artists in the fantasy field for his work on Dungeons & Dragons and Magic: The Gathering. However, to climb to the peak of role-playing artistry, he first had to endure a real-life odyssey. DiTerlizzi graduated with a degree in graphic design from The Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale in 1992. That September, at the urging of his friends, he sent samples of his fantasy drawings to TSR, Inc. (Tactical Studies Rules), the parent company and publisher of Dungeons & Dragons, which was created by Gary Gygax with Don Kaye in 1973. DiTerlizzi recalls receiving a rejection letter from TSR the next month. Not one to give up easily, he called the company the following Monday seeking advice on improving his work. The art director asked him to send more adventurous, character-driven pieces. DiTerlizzi did just that, but was rejected again.

Stubborn to the end, DiTerlizzi continued to send in submissions and in November 1992 he finally convinced TSR to give him a shot. The art director asked him to send more adventurous, character-driven pieces. DiTerlizzi did just that, but was rejected again.

With the same determination that had brought him to this point, DiTerlizzi developed a project that would appeal to the art director. He assembled a portfolio of imaginative characters and scenes from his childhood fascination with Dungeons & Dragons. This portfolio included sketches of creatures from the game world, such as orcs, goblins, and dragons. DiTerlizzi sent this portfolio to TSR, and this time his work was accepted.

Over the next several years, DiTerlizzi worked on various projects for TSR, including the artwork for the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons character sheets. He also created illustrations for the game's rulebook, the Monster Manual, and the Player's Handbook. His work caught the attention of Jim Henson, the creator of the Muppets, who hired him to create the art for the Dark Crystal film. This project allowed DiTerlizzi to apply the skills he had learned working on Dungeons & Dragons to a new medium.

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After several years of working at breakneck speed to meet the tight deadlines of the fantasy gaming industry, DiTerlizzi longed for a change. Through the lessons he learned creating characters, designing worlds, refining his technical skills, and capturing the attention of his audience, DiTerlizzi was able to seamlessly adapt into writing and illustrating children's books. His first such project, *Jimmy Zangwow's Out-of-this-World Moon Pie Adventure* (2000), was an instant hit.

A New Journey Begins

"Sometimes, when people grow up, they forget how to have fun."


*Jimmy Zangwow* is set in an undetermined time, presumably the mid-1930s. The book opens with a discussion between mother and son in a kitchen floor with black and white patterned linoleum tiles. On the kitchen counter sits a case of empty milk bottles while an aluminum biplane toy rests on the ground. We are firmly ensconced in the period as Jimmy innocently exclaims phrases like, "Aww, nuts!," "Gadzooks!," and "Holy macaroni."

It is almost dinnertime when the story begins, but Jimmy is in desperate need of a Moon Pie to sate his hunger. Robbed of the dessert by his mother who is busy preparing dinner, he ventures outdoors where he has constructed a flying jalopy made from spare wooden crates. He uses this makeshift spaceship to travel afar in search of a Moon Pie. On his adventure through outer space, Jimmy first encounters Mr. Moon, who resembles a powerful tremor sends Jimmy tumbling down to Mars where he meets 999 Mars Men and one Grimble Grinder monster, whose tummy grumbling caused Jimmy's descent to the Red Planet. After feeding the hungry monster one Moon Pie, Jimmy announces his desire to return home. In a place by film pioneer Georges Méliès. Jimmy soars by Mr. Moon via his jalopy inquiring about Moon Pies. Mr. Moon obliges by giving the boy an entire year's supply — 1,000 in total. Naturally, Jimmy requires some milk to go with his treat, for which Mr. Moon advises him to head to the Milky Way.

A powerful tremor sends Jimmy tumbling down to Mars where he meets 999 Mars Men and one Grimble Grinder monster, whose tummy grumbling caused Jimmy's descent to the Red Planet. After feeding the hungry monster one Moon Pie, Jimmy announces his desire to return home. In a reference to *The Wizard of Oz*, the 999 Mars Men make a hot-air balloon out of Moon Pie Wrappers that the Grimble Grinder happily agrees to fuel with gas from a burp, though he requires the remaining 999 Moon Pies to obtain the effect. Upon achieving flight, Jimmy promises his new friends, "I'll come back again soon!"

As with DiTerlizzi's follow-up book, *Ted*, Jimmy's sole parent does not have a name. Her face is never shown. In fact, in the twenty-one illustrations in the book, she is the only adult shown and appears only on the first page. This is a book full of imagination, and there is little room for the realism of the adult world.

After the success of *Jimmy Zangwow*, DiTerlizzi wrote and illustrated *Ted*, the tale of a boy and his imaginary friend, set in an era around 1960. DiTerlizzi recalls that a key scene from the book was based on an actual event from his childhood. "I remember my parents had just painted my bedroom robin's egg blue. The following morning, I drew all over those glorious blank blue walls. Mom was furious. 'Wait until your father comes home!' she warned. As punishment, I had to spend the afternoon wiping off my drawings."

The story involves a lonely, pre-school boy who meets an imaginary friend named Ted. The boy creates Ted because his father is preoccupied with work and he has no one else with whom to play. The large, boisterous, pink Ted shows up at the boy's house one week after the boy's "I'll come back again soon!"
A careful reader will note the Grimble Grinder creature from the previous year’s *Jimmy Zangwow* appears on the television in the living room while Mr. Moon from the same car can be carved on the foot of the boy’s bed. The father’s Atomic Blaster was based on a 1936 Buck Rogers Liquid Helium Water Pistol, and the father’s features were based on photographs of a young Frank Oz, the puppeteering partner of the late Jim Henson. Throughout the story, the father’s eyes remain hidden behind reflected light on the lens of his glasses, only to be revealed at the climax of the story. His visage brings to mind Norman Rockwell’s famous painting, *Triple Self-Portrait*.

DiTerlizzi recalls that *Ted* was originally intended to be a much longer story. In early drafts, the boy’s grandfather also lived in the house and was also able to see Ted since he had regained the imagination he lost when he grew up. When DiTerlizzi puts pen to paper to write a book, he describes it as an attempt to sort out what’s going on in his head. According to the author, *Ted* deals with the responsibility of a father who was once a playful kid, just like his son.” For the thirty-year-old artist, Ted was a way to reconcile the adult he had become with the child he once was. DiTerlizzi remarks that although *Ted* did not achieve bestseller status, it appears to have been among the most meaningful to his readers over the years.

For the remainder of 2001, DiTerlizzi took on side jobs, including illustrating the covers of Phyllis Reynolds Naylor’s *Bernie Magruder* book series and J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Unfinished Tales*. The following year, he painted the covers for Bruce Coville’s *Magic Shop* series and provided a new cover and illustrations for Anne McCaffrey’s *Dragonflight* before releasing an updated version of a classic tale that would win him a major literary award.

Based on the 1829 poem by Mary Howitt, *The Spider and the Fly* was a departure from DiTerlizzi’s earlier children’s books. In this retelling, he was illustrating a classic tale instead of his own, and it was painted in shades of black and grey instead of the Maxfield Parrish-inspired palette of vivid blue and orange in *Jimmy Zangwow* or the bright pink and yellow of *Ted*. However, DiTerlizzi’s illustrations thrilled readers and critics alike. The book put DiTerlizzi on the *New York Times* bestseller list and won him a Caldecott Honor Award, which recognizes the “most distinguished American picture book for children.” DiTerlizzi was at the top of his game. But just when it seemed that things couldn’t get any better – they did.

*Spiderwick Takes Off*

“...Who’d dare live within a stream beneath a bridge where dark thoughts teem? And where’d your loose tooth really go? To a friend? Or to a foe? Keep on reading and you will know.”


DiTerlizzi met his co-author for *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, Holly Black, in the mid-1990s when she interviewed DiTerlizzi about his work on *Dungeons & Dragons* for the short-lived *d8* gaming magazine. The pair found they had much in common – they both adored the fantasy films of Jim Henson, as well as Brian Froud and Alan Lee’s *Faeries* book (1978), and they had been raised by stay-at-home mothers who were artists. They quickly became good friends.

In 2001 DiTerlizzi began working on a book titled *Arthur Spiderwick’s Field Guide to the Fantastical World Around You*. At the time, his wife Angela was assisting Holly Black in getting her first novel, *Tithe: A Modern Faerie Tale*, published. DiTerlizzi read Black’s manuscript and discovered she had a vast knowledge of fairy folklore. He quickly recruited her to assist him in gathering research for his fantasy-themed field guide.

In discussions with his editor, Kevin Lewis, at Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, DiTerlizzi realized there was more to the Arthur Spiderwick story than just the field guide. He believed he could create another story based around the character of Arthur Spiderwick. Unlike *Arthur Spiderwick’s Field Guide to the Fantastical World Around You*, which was meant to resemble an old reference book, Lewis felt the story should be set in the modern era so that contemporary readers could easily relate. However, DiTerlizzi knew he did not have the time or ability to write and illustrate both books alone, and thought Holly Black would complement him well. DiTerlizzi recalls that everything quickly came together, noting it was a “very cohesive story because Holly and I were very compatible together.”


*The Spiderwick Chronicles* was an astounding success with children, parents, and teachers alike. The series topped the *New York Times* bestseller list and to date has sold over fifteen million copies and been translated into thirty languages. The triumph of the series spawned a handful of spin-off publications, including *Arthur Spiderwick’s Notebook for Fantastical Observations* (2005), *Arthur Spiderwick’s Field Guide to the Fantastical World Around You* (2005), *The Spiderwick Chronicles: Care and Feeding of Sprites* (2006), and the *Beyond the Spiderwick Chronicles* series (2007) in addition to a feature film and video game.
The Spiderwick Chronicles was released by Paramount Pictures in February 2008 and starred Freddie Highmore, Mary-Louise Parker, Nick Nolte, David Strathaim, and Martin Short, with music by James Horner and cinematography by Caleb Deschanel. The success of the books translated to the screen and the film became a hit with audiences and critics. For those keeping track, it currently holds a respectable 80% approval on Rotten Tomatoes.

When asked about the impact of Spiderwick's explosive popularity on Tony's ability to retain his childlike imagination, Angela notes, "For as much as his work has evolved, he is still the same person that he's always been." He humbly declares, "I'm just a guy who tells stories for children."

Indeed, DiTerlizzi's humility is one of his strongest traits. He attributes this in part to a meeting he and his brother Adam had with a famous comic book artist at a convention they attended when he was in art school. Although Adam met the artist and received his signature, the artist made no attempt to make eye contact with him or any of his young fans in the crowded line. His brother was crushed under the weight of his hero's massive ego. Yet several months later, the DiTerlizzi brothers met another comic book artist who spent time talking art with the pair, even selling an original published drawing to the boys for whatever they could afford, which literally amounted to pocket change. DiTerlizzi recalls this moment fondly, thinking at the time, "This guy is genuine. He is ... awesome." The memory of that meeting was pivotal in DiTerlizzi's desire to remain true to his fans.

After Spiderwick

"And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don't believe in magic will never find it."

Coming down from the high achieved from the phenomenal success of The Spiderwick Chronicles, DiTerlizzi created a silly alphabet book, G is for One Gzonk!, before turning to a book he loved reading as a child. Released in 2008, Kenny & the Dragon is DiTerlizzi's retelling of Kenneth Grahame's 1898 book The Reluctant Dragon. DiTerlizzi recalls reading a copy of Grahame's book which was illustrated by Ernest H. Shepard, who also illustrated Grahame's classic The Wind in the Willows (1908) for the 1931 edition.

Kenny shares many similarities with DiTerlizzi — the misfit who loves fairy tales and natural history and possesses a wild imagination. In the book, Kenny (a bunny) discovers an enormous dragon, Grahame, on his family's property (both characters are named after the author of the original book). In order to learn more about the dragon, Kenny consults a borrowed book titled The King's Royal Bestiary. After identifying some inaccuracies within the book, Grahame suggests that Kenny will go on to write his own book someday, in a nod to DiTerlizzi's own bestiary, Arthur Spiderwick's Field Guide to the Fantastical World Around You. (Saint) George, the local bookseller, is ordered by the king, and encouraged by the townspeople, to slay the dragon, although Kenny devises a plan which will satisfy all sides. Kenny & the Dragon not only became an instant bestseller, but continues to be celebrated in schools across the country in "one-book-one-school" programs.

Adventure of Meno, created by Tony and Angela DiTerlizzi in 2009, is a favorite of mine, though my fascination with the mid-century book elicits giggles and groans from the pair. Meno was intended to be a series of light-hearted children's books that were colorful, silly, and full of imagination. The plot involves a boy elf named Meno and his adventures with his friend Yamagoo, a floating jellyfish. DiTerlizzi's editor was as excited as I to see the work in print, so Simon & Schuster released four books in the Adventure of Meno series, titled Big Fun!, Wet Friend!, Yummy Tripl!, and Uh-Oh Sick!

However, Amazon was experimenting with its Vine program at the time, which meant that free copies of books were arbitrarily distributed to a small but vocal group of Amazon customers, many of whom were not the target audience for children's books and unfortunately did not comprehend the humor of the books. This shaky start led to a poor launch for the Meno series. Tony and Angela, along with Simon & Schuster, decided to shelve the remaining titles and move onto a project DiTerlizzi had been thinking about for over a decade.

Though it was not published until 2010, The WondLa Trilogy was first imagined around 1998 when The Spiderwick Chronicles was in development. The series carries on the tradition of elegantly illustrated children's books. DiTerlizzi notes that the inspiration for WondLa came from "books that I loved as a kid that my mom had read to me, classics like Peter Pan, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, and The Wonderful Wizard of Oz." The idea for the story evolved as a response to Spiderwick — a story from the past coming forward to present — which led DiTerlizzi to conceive a story from the future coming backward to the present. This was combined with a now middle-aged author thinking of what the world would be like when his young daughter reached his age.

The first book in the series, The Search for WondLa, introduces us to the protagonist, a twelve-year-old girl named Eva Nine. She is being raised in an underground Sanctuary solely by her Muthr — a Multi-Utility Task Help Robot. When her Sanctuary is invaded, Eva Nine escapes to the surface of the planet Orbona, a world with which she has no connection. She is accompanied by her handheld Omnipod, a device which was designed to aid her growing up underground, but cannot provide much information on the outside world, along with two newfound companions: the alien Rovender Kitt and a gigantic water bear. In the remaining books in the series, A Hero for WondLa and The Battle for WondLa, her friends travel with her to the human-populated city of New Attica where Eva Nine finally learns what it means to be human, and struggles to save the world she holds dear.

Though The WondLa Trilogy contains many of the themes of DiTerlizzi's previous works — a search for identity and a need for companionship in a fantasy world — the series reveals a writer deep in thought. He seems to be pondering his own place in the world and the role he can fill to effect a better future. The books reveal a more mature author and illustrator, and I predict they will be read for years to come.

In 2014, DiTerlizzi was commissioned to write the text that accompanied several of Ralph McQuarrie's concept paintings for a book titled The Adventures of Luke Skywalker: Jedi Knight. This project provided DiTerlizzi with the chance of a lifetime. As a child he spent days in his bedroom reading the original Star Wars novelisations. The project allowed him to do something he always dreamed of.
Jesse Kowalski, Curator of Exhibitions, Norman Rockwell Museum

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- Norman Rockwell

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